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Art-Watching, Limited Edition Art Book

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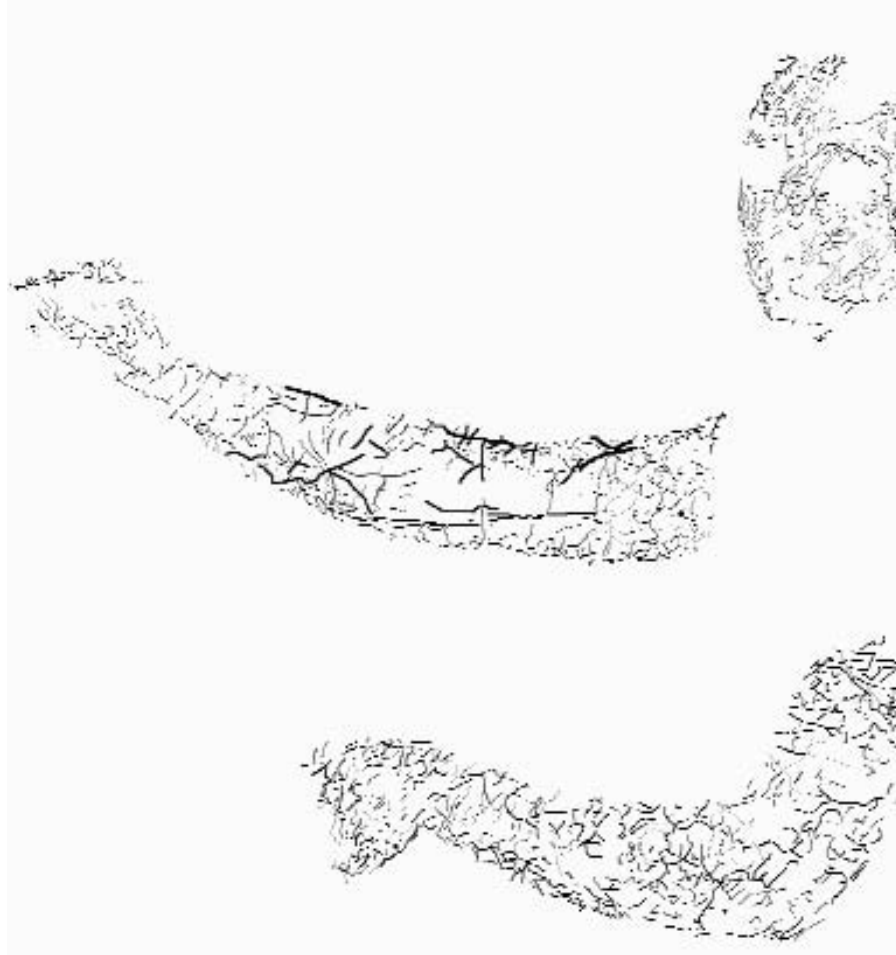
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Art-Watching
.....
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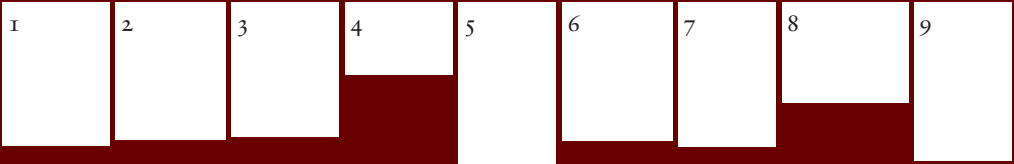
Art-Watching



*(Based on the
collection of
Dublin City Gallery:
The Hugh Lane and
The National
Gallery, London)*

.....Art-Watching, like most collaborative projects, began as a series of conversations. These conversations revolved around the nature, purpose and pleasure of looking at and watching art. An early outcome of the project was a supplement in Circa Magazine. Designed by Information Design Art-Watching was published in Summer 2006. Alongside our text and drawings inspired by the collection at the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, we invited 12 art writers, critics, historians, curators and conservators to submit a reflective text on the subject of 'watching art'. Each contributor focused on a particular work or exhibition that held a significance for them.

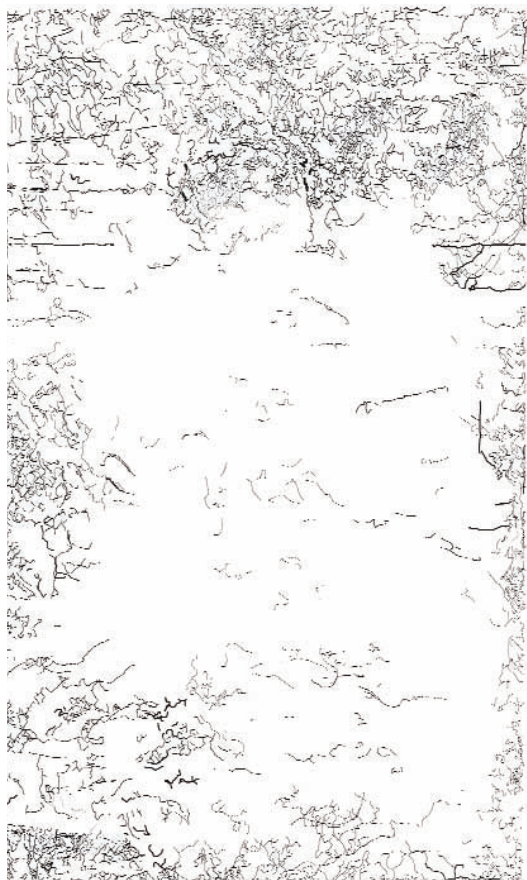
This publication further reflects upon chosen paintings from the collection at the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane. It is designed by Brenda Dermody and Austin Carey and presents digital drawings by Brian Fay and texts by Niamh Ann Kelly. Together we chose nine paintings from this collection that appealed to us in order to consider the various processes of watching over art. These Irish and international paintings address a range of themes and show a selection of painting techniques. From viewing these nine works, the texts were developed as a series of thoughts on art, it's subjects and preservation. The digital hand drawings are tracings of the paintings cracked surfaces and record the effect time and history has had on their materials and supports. The book format allowed our interests as designer, artist and art writer to converge. We wish to thank the following for their generous support in making Art-Watching possible: Barbara Dawson, Christine Kennedy, Liz Forster, Joanna Shepard at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane; John O'Connor, The School of Art, Design and Printing, Dublin Institute of Technology, Dr Ellen Hazelkorn and Dr Brian O'Neill the Faculty of Applied Arts at the Dublin Institute of Technology; Peter Fitzgerald at Circa Art Magazine; Dr Michael Purser, Vivien Adams and all at the National Gallery London.



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How can we look back at art made before our time? To begin to know about art from the past, or even art of today, we must of course be enabled to see it. The roles of art patrons, collectors, galleries and curators are fundamental in creating this situation of sight. When Hugh Lane first set about gathering together a collection for Ireland, he did so in the belief that if Irish artists could see what their nineteenth century contemporaries throughout Europe were doing their art would benefit. Though Lane met resistance to his projects, he also garnered warm support along the way from colleagues, friends and family, and one notably robust supporter was his cousin Captain John Shawe-Taylor.¹ Another advocate was George Moore though his influence, controversially, tied Lane’s artistic awareness to what were perceived as more liberal lifestyles and so began a debate on the suitability of the Lane’s endeavours.² But another set of questions arose also and remains with us still: what is European art or American art and further, what is Irish art? Where does art’s nationality outline itself? Surely art connects us to each other as often as it differentiates between us. In a similarly paradoxical way art connects the present to the past in the same moment that it distinguishes the gait and glance of each generation.³

¹ For an example of how Shawe-Taylor intervened in a dispute centred on an exhibition of works organized by Lane at the National Museum Dublin, see O’Byrne (2000: 70-73).
² See Roy Foster’s essay ‘Orpen and The New Ireland’ in: Upstone (2005: 70).
³ Phrase refers to Baudelaire’s discussion on modern painting (1995).



After Mancini *En Voyage*
Digital Hand Drawing Dimensions
Variable 2005



Mancini, Antonio, *On a Journey*
(*En Voyage*), Oil on canvas, 96.5 x
57.8cm, Sir Hugh Lane Bequest,
1917; on loan to Dublin City
Gallery: The Hugh Lane since
1979. © National Gallery, London
*, Circa 1903

The cracks that appear along the surface of an oil painting over time can tell us a lot about how the painter painted: what area of the canvas was tended by short light strokes, where the paint was thickly applied or what was the relative weight and urgency of the gestures used. These feint or heavy tracks of time can also reveal something about the painter's attitude to her or his subject: what part of the image required slow and careful modification, what area of the surface needed to be rendered more boldly. The passage of time and the wearing effect of history on the surfaces of works are as intriguing as the images contained within their gilded frames. A painting is the accumulated history of its making, maintenance, storage, display and conservation and so the evident ageing on its surface and in its structure adds to its unique presence. The impatient hurry of a painter anxious to impress her or his image on the canvas may mean that the layers of paint beneath the top one were not best laid or the medium was inadequately mixed with the oil colours. The canvas may have been poorly stretched or hastily primed. Or quite simply the painting has like a known and loved face betrayed its experience, in the same way an expressive web-like lattice of fine lines around someone's eyes suggests a life embraced with enthusiasm.

Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot
Woman Meditating, Oil on Canvas
 38 x 29.2cm, Collection Dublin
 City Gallery: The Hugh Lane,
 Undated



After Corot Woman Meditating
 Digital Hand Drawing Dimensions
 Variable 2005



A young woman meditates in a Corot painting. She looks out beyond the picture frame with her hands clasped across her knees. Is she rocking to and fro? Maybe, in a gently pensive motion. The olive greens and earthy browns of the painting are muted like her expression; soft light emphasizes the subtle tones of her clothing. The contours of her body are brought into focus by the strength of a triangular composition. A small painting yet it draws me in. I get close to see it, to take in the detail. This girl wears what seems like a medieval fancy dress costume: a long-sleeved gown with a delicate pearl drop earring visible on her left ear. Her dark red headband is the single vibrant dash of colour in the work. Grace Henry's painting *The Girl in White* exudes a similar sense of quiet assurance. A seated girl resting on a palely depicted sofa in an interior of cool calm colours creates a portrait of serenity. This young woman sees me, looks me directly in the eye and seems confident of her presence. It is as if these paintings, almost unknown to the sitters and artists, are a metaphor for the thoughtful forbearing attitude women often adopt in their negotiations of political, social and cultural life. These images speak to me of a particularly female kind of contemplation.

Grace Henry, *The Girl in White*,
Oil on Canvas 61 x 51cm,
Collection: Dublin City Gallery:
The Hugh Lane, 1912



After Henry: Girl in White
Digital Hand Drawing, Dimensions
Variable 2005





William Orpen: *Captain Shawe-Taylor* Oil on Canvas 73.2 x 62cm,
Dublin City Gallery: The Hugh
Lane, 1908



After Orpen: *Captain Shawe-Taylor*, Digital Hand Drawing
Dimensions Variable 2005

The art gallery, as a generic site, may be one of the few places in contemporary life where one can physically escape the tug and pull of the familiar everyday world. Here anyone can partake in a caesura created by art; become immersed in art's distraction and challenged by its statements. This moment of distraction/challenge interests me: what is the nature of the absorption that keeps a viewer standing in front of a work, not wanting to leave? What made Lane as consistent in his support of art as he was in his faith in the potential of individual artists, such as Antonio Mancini?⁴ Is it the same drive that propels the collector to collect, a sort of captivation by art that demands complete attention if only for a while?

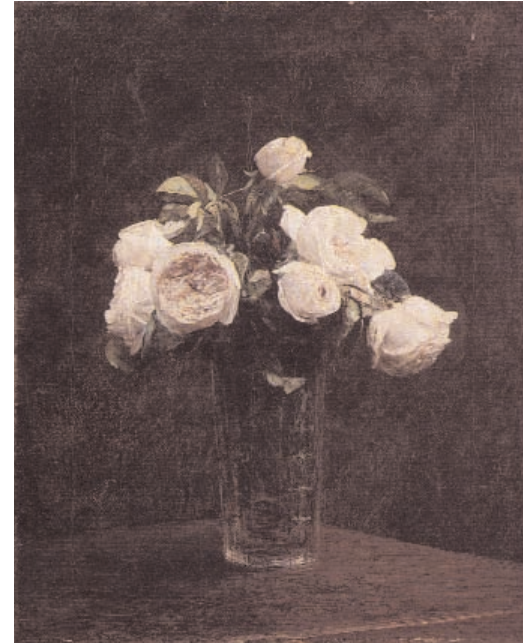
This fascination with art holds our gaze, makes us persist in looking and travelling to see art, old and new. However, the distraction of art is much more than a device by which we are removed from the rest of our lives for the duration of looking: it contains a promise of revelation that brings us into the gallery in the first place. To follow art is akin to becoming its lover: to want to see and experience as much of art as possible as often as possible is a commitment as well as a passion.

Since Hugh Lane began his art collection a century ago, the gallery's collection has changed in its formation, but essentially maintains a constant outcome - to inform, challenge and delight contemporary viewers. True to Lane's intentions, the collection continues to expand its stock of art and has become, as the art dealer would no doubt have relished, the cue for temporary exhibitions of significant art. Lane was an avid organiser of art exhibitions and believed in the advantageous effect of such events for artists, the art market and, I believe, art lovers also. So, beyond Lane's material legacy, how does a painting come to be part of this collection in Dublin? Consider *A Woman Mediating* by Jean-Baptiste Corot.

This work was not part of the original Hugh Lane collection but was presented to the city's gallery when it first opened to the public in 1907 by a group called the Ladies of Ireland. This group of women, also known as the Irishwomen's Picture League, was co-run by Countess Constance Markievicz and Mrs Noel Guinness.⁶ And though economic power continues to date to play too large a role in what art is seen where, when and who by, the history of art has been and will no doubt continue to be shaped in part by far-seeing innovative individuals such as Lane and energetic volunteer groups such as the Ladies of Ireland.

⁴ For further on how Lane persisted in supporting Mancini, even through an unproductive period, see O'Byrne (2000: 94-97).

⁶ O'Byrne (2000: 77).



⁷ Discussed by Gordon Bowe, Nicola, 'Art and the Public: the Friends of the National Collections of Ireland' in: *The Friends of the National Collections of Ireland* (1999: 11-15). ⁸ Discussed by Anne Crookshank in: *The National Gallery of Ireland/The Douglas Hyde Gallery* (1987: 5). ⁹ Quoted in MacGonigal (27/01/90).

Women in the field of patronage are at times less recognised than their male counterparts and in the development of the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane women have played central roles. In 1905, a key painting was presented to the collection because of one woman's horticultural and philanthropic interests - *Blush Roses* by Henri Fantin-Latour. Lady Ardilaun was born Olivia Herbert and throughout her life was a keen art, design and garden enthusiast. Such was her and her husband's (Sir Arthur Edward Guinness) dedication to roses that a rose, souvenir de St Anne, was named after the couple's garden at Clontarf in Dublin. So I imagine this luscious painting, with its delicately described pink rose petals might well have been close to Lady Ardilaun's heart. And it was a woman, the artist Sarah Purser, who we can thank for the current location of the gallery in Charlemont House at the North end of Parnell Square. Purser was a central force in founding the Society of the Friends of the National Collections of Ireland,⁷ an organisation that has continued to contribute hugely to our public collections and she also promoted the academic discipline of art history in Ireland.⁸ The work of these women continues to bring life to the spirit of Hugh Lane's reflection on the nature of presenting art to the public domain: 'When I give a thing to a public gallery, it is still mine, I can go and see it but so can everyone else'.⁹



Nathaniel Hone, *Evening Malahide*, Oil on Canvas, 85 x 126cm, Dublin City Gallery: The Hugh Lane, c. 1883

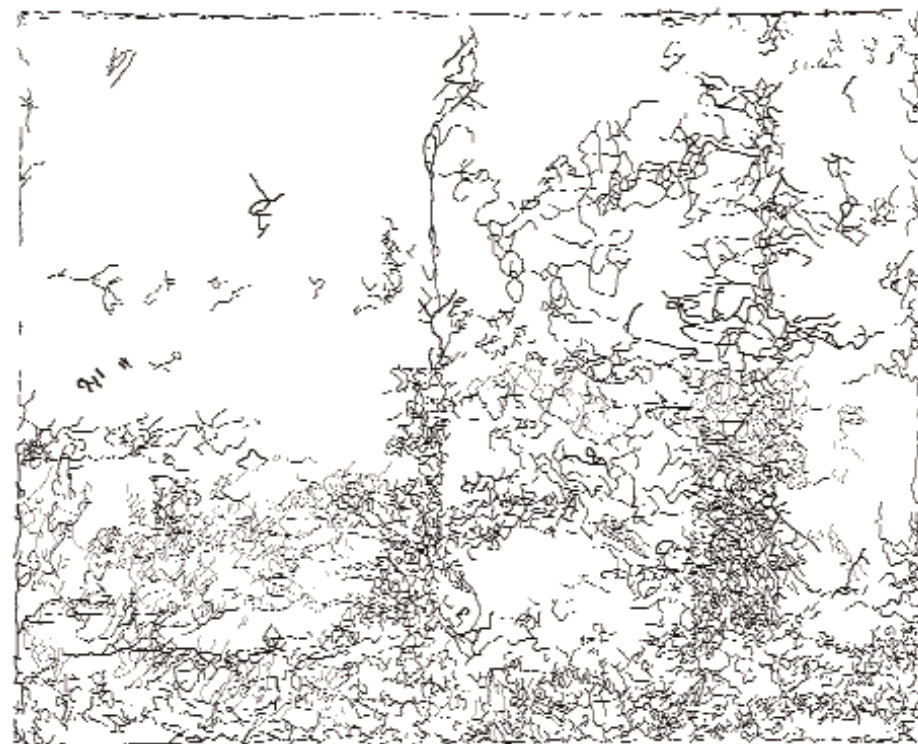


After Hone: *Evening Malahide*, Digital Hand Drawing, Dimensions Variable 2005



Courbet, Jean-Désiré-Gustave, *In the Forest*, Oil on canvas, 80 x 99.1cm, Sir Hugh Lane Bequest, 1917; on loan to Dublin City Gallery: The Hugh Lane since 1979. © National Gallery, London*, 1859

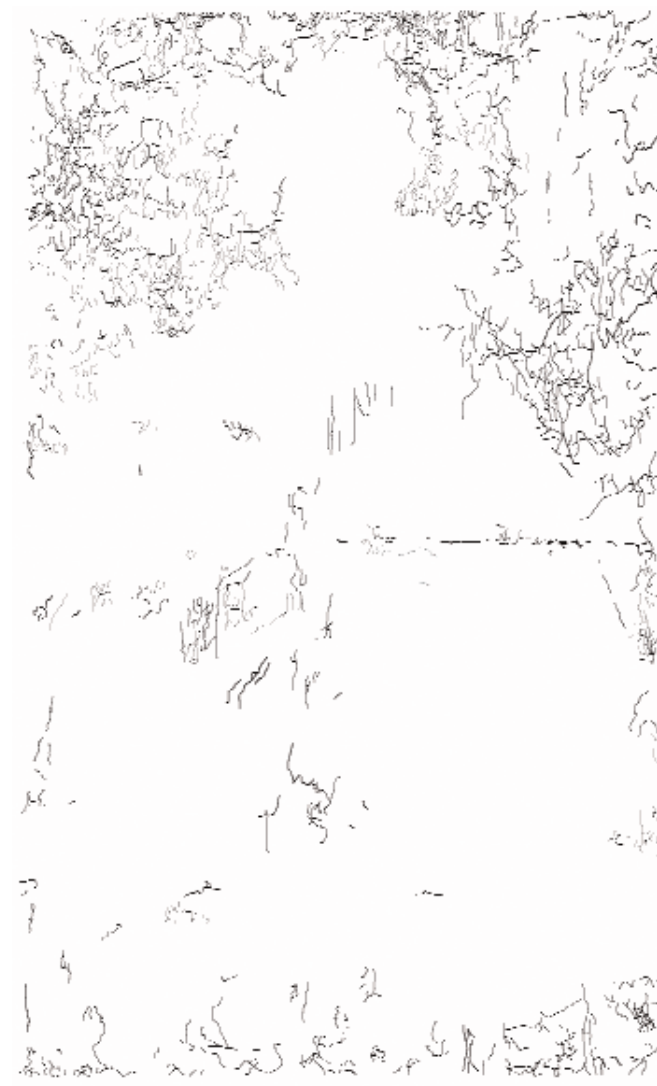
Light appears in the distance through a dark and ominous-looking thicket of trees. Carefree deer make their way to a pool of water in a clearing. The sense of moist leafy forest air is balanced by lingering trickles of sunlight on meadow-like soft grass beneath the foliage. It seems that autumn has entered the scene, announcing its intentions in copper tones and golden hues. Or perhaps it is simply the evening-time that appears, the ending of a shorter duration: maybe it is a day that slowly fades and not a year. There is no mistaking an evening sunset at Malahide and its evocation of reflective quietude. A skyline distinctly Irish in temperament seems to enlarge the spatial impression of the panorama, so that the two small figures collecting shells or mussels on the shoreline become minute actors on a sweeping stage. The sea breeze can almost be tasted. And though sumptuous in their beauty, a modest posy of blush roses in a glass can appear as temporary as the days and seasons that surpass them. These tenderly painted arrests of nature's march go a long way to remind the gallery visitor of a softly breathing world beyond the din of urban life.



After Courbet: *In the forest*
Digital Hand Drawing Dimensions
Variable 2005



Purser, Sarah, *Portrait of Maude Gonne*, Oil on Canvas,
Dimensions: 176.5 x 105.5cm
Dublin City Gallery: The Hugh Lane, Date: 1890. Presented by the Friends of the National Collections of Ireland, 1944.



After Purser: *Maude Gonne*, Digital
Hand Drawing, Dimensions
Variable 2005



The wife, the lover, the mother, the daughter, the model, the muse. It is an uneasy fact but in art women still occupy a contested space both on and behind the canvas. Similarly in Irish history, women's activism and attitudes have been noticeably under-accounted.⁵ Women were and are social activists, cultural revolutionaries, art collectors and artists; women are not the subjects of art by virtue of their sex alone. Such are the dangers of being reduced to a muse that the roles played by pioneering women such as Sarah Purser, Maude Gonne and others active in cultural life in Ireland and elsewhere have on occasional telling seemed misleadingly removed from the political and social consciousness that attended their lives' work. We might remember some for their partners or teachers, as history-writers footnote them in the peripheral life of 'great' men. Recent historical critiques are questioning the extent of influence that these companions may have had over their more famed partners or colleagues and vice versa. Eva Gonzales directly addresses both her portraitist, on this occasion Edouard Manet, and us, her viewers. We see her as she was: an artist at work at her easel. As Maude Gonne stands, resplendent, she turns her assertive gaze onto her portraitist Sarah Purser and towards us also. These two women seem appropriately recognised and remembered in art, looking back at us for eternity.

⁵ The recent scholarship of, for example, Margaret Ward and Maria Luddy has begun to redress this imbalance in historical account, but also serves to highlight the scale of the task in hand.

Edouard Manet *Eva Gonzalès*,
Oil on Canvas, 191.1 x 133.4cm,
NG3259. Sir Hugh Lane Bequest,
1917; on loan to Dublin City
Gallery: The Hugh Lane since
1979. © National Gallery,
London*, 1870

Art holds for me a fascination that compels me to keep looking or, rather, to keep watch. Levinas wrote eloquently on the subject of the same and other in social terms and through his account identified the significance of what he termed love. Bourdieu and Darbel questioned the social constructs behind ‘the love of art’ and maybe hi-jacked the phrase in doing so.¹⁰ I’d like to reclaim that term, the love of art. Levinas wrote of vigilance as key to understanding the love of an-other. His proposition was ethically driven and biblical in his choice of metaphor when he suggested that love stays up all night and watches over the other.¹¹ If art is an other, literally existing outside of us, then to hold vigil over it – to physically stand in front of it, to be in it, listen, touch or see it in whatever form it takes – is to love it. To express that love of art through the memory of it, by returning to it or to talk or write about it, is simply the sustenance of a vigil that began with the first meeting. If artists through their practice intervene in everyday experience, and they do so again and again, then their art holds a type of vigil over us, its subjects. As critics, curators and collectors continue to ‘show and tell’ the art they’ve known, the visitor too returns to the gallery to watch over something they love.

¹⁰ Bourdieu & Darbel (1991).
¹¹ Interviewed in: Kearney (1995: 195).

After Manet Eva Gonzalès, Digital Hand
Drawing Dimensions Variable 2005



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Credits

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